



Date: March 25, 2020

To: Community Living Assistance and Support Services
Case Management Agencies
Community Living Assistance and Support Services Direct Service
Agencies
Deaf Blind Multiple Disabilities Program Providers

Subject: Information Letter No.20-10
HHSC Guidance for the CLASS and DBMD Program Providers on
COVID-19

The purpose of this information letter is to provide guidance to DBMD program providers, CLASS direct services agencies (DSA), and CLASS case management agencies (CMAs) on the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Program providers have the responsibility to protect the health and safety of individuals receiving Medicaid waiver services. At this time, COVID-19 presents a health and safety risk to individuals receiving DBMD and CLASS services. This guidance is based on additional direction from Governor Abbott and the Department of State Health Services.

Requirement of DBMD and CLASS Program Providers

DBMD and CLASS program providers are required to comply with state and federal laws, rules, regulations, and letters regarding the DBMD and CLASS programs.¹ In response to COVID-19, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is issuing the following guidance to program and case management providers to help reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus to individuals receiving services. DBMD program providers, CLASS CMAs, and CLASS DSAs must follow guidance issued by:

- The [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC);
- The [Department of State Health Services](#) (DSHS);

¹ See 40 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) [40 TAC §49.302\(e\) and \(g\)](#)
P.O. Box 13247 • Austin, Texas 78711-3247 • 512-424-6500 • [hhs.texas.gov](#)

- The [Health and Human Services Commission](#) (HHSC); and
- Their local public health departments.

As licensed home and community support services agencies (HCSSAs), DBMD program providers and CLASS DSAs are required to implement personnel practices that safeguard individuals against the spread of infectious disease². They must ensure that they have processes in place to reduce the spread of communicable and infectious diseases and that those processes are updated to comply with CDC guidance as it changes.

DBMD and CLASS DSA program providers should protect individuals by having them refrain from receiving day habilitation or pre-vocational services in group settings or attending public events in which people are gathered. Governor Abbott under Executive Order GA-08, local health departments and municipalities are issuing guidance about the size of community gatherings that DBMD and CLASS providers must adhere to in their local areas.

Program providers must have continuous availability of trained and qualified service providers to deliver services as outlined in the individual's service plan. Program providers should actively and consistently monitor individuals for potential symptoms of respiratory infection. They must ensure a nurse is notified immediately of any individual who begins exhibiting symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. The nurse should notify the individual's physician immediately.

Program providers should contact their local health department, or DSHS if there is no local health department, if:

- they have questions related to COVID-19;
- they suspect an individual has COVID-19; or
- there is an increase in the number of respiratory illnesses among individuals or service providers.

² [26 TAC §558.285](#)

Required Prohibition of Nonessential Visitors

Based on Executive Order GA-08³, people will no longer be allowed to enter DBMD assisted living settings serving 4-6 individuals except direct care staff and other professionals providing critical assistance to individuals. Persons with a legal right to enter the home may only do so to address a critical need. DBMD program providers should also discuss visitation protocols with individuals residing in licensed home health assisted living provider one to three bed homes. As these homes are supported by DBMD providers 24 hours a day, prohibition of non-essential visitors is strongly encouraged.

“Essential visitors” who are there to provide critical assistance include provider staff and other persons who are providers of essential services or who are persons with legal authority to enter a setting where services are provided, provided their visit is for the purpose of providing critical assistance to individuals. The DBMD program provider must continue to staff the home and ensure critical needs are met. DBMD Program providers must have a service backup plan for all critical program services; the provider may use that plan as a guide in determining critical assistance.

DBMD program providers are encouraged to:

- use alternate means of communication, such as FaceTime, Skype or other video or telephone conferencing systems, to promote ongoing contact between individuals and their friends and family members
- relay messages via text and phone calls to assist individuals to remain informed and in touch with their friends, family members, and communities

Required Screening of Essential Visitors

DBMD program providers may allow an essential visitor providing critical assistance to enter a location where services are provided unless the essential visitor has:

- fever or signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat;
- had contact in the last 14 days with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, is under investigation for COVID-19, or is ill with respiratory illness; or

³ Governor Greg Abbott—GA-08 https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA_08_COVID-19_preparedness_and_mitigation_FINAL_03-19-2020_1.pdf

- traveled within the previous 14 days to a country with sustained community transmission. For updated information on affected countries visit:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

DBMD Providers of Assisted Living and Licensed Home Health Assisted Living

- Program providers must ensure that all one-to-three-bed licensed home health assisted living homes and four-to-six-bed assisted living homes are equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE) including soap, commercially produced hand sanitizer, gloves, masks and any other disinfecting agents necessary to maintain a healthful environment. HHSC understands PPE may be unavailable. Providers must make every effort to obtain PPE and have it on hand.
- Program provider staff should ensure precautions to limit the spread of infection are taken, such as:
 - ▶ Limiting physical contact, such as handshaking and hugging;
 - ▶ Reinforcing strong hygiene practices for individuals and staff, such as proper handwashing, covering of coughs and sneezes, and the regular use of hand sanitizer, which is especially important to individuals and service providers engaging in tactual communication;
 - ▶ Practicing social distancing;
 - ▶ Using gloves when touching individuals; and
 - ▶ Regularly disinfecting surfaces that are touched often, such as counters, doorknobs, and telephones.

- If individuals are showing signs of COVID-19 infection, providers need to isolate these individuals and notify the program provider nurse and the individual's physician. Providers should ensure PPE is available to staff and individuals who are showing symptoms as outlined in CDC and DSHS guidance on COVID 19 to the greatest extent possible.
- A DBMD program provider must ensure it has an Emergency Preparedness Plan that addresses all required elements.⁴

How to request personal protective equipment if urgently needed:

DBMD and CLASS DSA Program providers and CLASS CMAs should work with their local health department and local emergency management to submit a State of Texas Assistance Request (STAR) for urgently needed personal protective equipment, such as gloves and masks. The links below are helpful sources a program provider can use:

- [State of Texas Assistance Request \(STAR\)](#)
- [Public Health Region](#)
- [Local Public Health Organizations](#)

Additional Resources

Department of State Health Services COVID-19: [Guidance for Public Health Home Service Providers.](#)

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact the Long term Services and Supports (LTSS) Policy team by email at CLASSPolicy@hhsc.state.tx.us or DBMDPolicy@hhsc.state.tx.us

Sincerely,

[signature on file]

Emily Zalkovsky

Deputy Associate Commissioner of Policy and Program
Medicaid and CHIP Services

⁴ 40 TAC [§42.630](#) and 26 TAC [§558.256](#)